

Robert Turner

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE 61ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Representative Robert Turner
Assembly Bill 832
Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
March 23, 2010

Thank you Representative Berceau and members of the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 832. Assembly Bill 832 is a companion bill to Senate Bill 338, authored by Senator John Lehman.

Under the state's funeral and cemetery aids program, the Department of Health Services reimburses counties and tribal governing bodies for the funeral costs they are required to pay on behalf of certain low-income individuals who, at the time of their death, were participants in entitlement programs such as Medical Assistance, Wisconsin Works, and the Supplemental Security Income program.

Reimbursement for funeral and burial expenses currently is limited to \$1,500, and is available only if the decedent's total funeral and burial expenses do not exceed \$3,500, a level that was set in 1995.

Assembly Bill 832 would require the state to provide reimbursement for funeral and burial expenses in cases where the decedent's total funeral and burial expenses do not exceed \$4,500. It is important to note that Assembly Bill 832 does *not* increase the amount of aid provided by the state, but it does raise the cap on total funeral costs to \$4,500. Any payments over \$1,500 must be made by friends and relatives who approve that level of expenditure.

According to the most recent data provided by the National Funeral Directors Association, the cost of an average funeral is over \$7,300. Wisconsin's funeral directors often drastically reduce the price of even their least costly services to allow families to utilize state assistance.

In order for funeral homes to continue to provide this service without needing to pass their losses on to other customers, this bill makes a necessary adjustment for inflation. This change would also allow families of the deceased to contribute more



toward their loved one's funeral. To maintain this important benefit for low-income people, I urge the committee to support Assembly Bill 832.

I also want to let you know that the companion bill, Senate Bill 338, passed the Senate Committee on Ethics Reform and Government on a vote of 5-0. It passed the Joint Finance Committee on March 17, 2010 on a vote of 16-0, as amended by Senate Amendment 1. Senate Amendment 1 delays the implementation date of this bill to January 1, 2011.

I have drafted a similar amendment, in anticipation that the committee will take executive action on this bill before the commencement of the April floorperiod.

Thank you very much for your consideration.



Wisconsin State Senate
John Lehman
Senator — 21st District

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Testimony of Senator John Lehman
Assembly Bill 832
Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
March 23, 2010

Thank you Chairperson Berceau and members of the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 832.

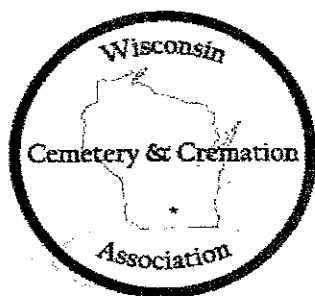
Wisconsin, through the counties, currently provides \$1,500 to help cover funeral expenses for those who had limited or no assets at the time of death. This ensures that even the poorest among us has a right to a proper funeral. In order to qualify for this funding, the total cost of a funeral must be no higher than \$3,500, a level set in 1995.

It is important to note that Assembly Bill 832 does *not* increase the amount of aid provided by the state, but it does raise the cap on total funeral costs to \$4,500. Any payments over \$1,500 must be made by friends and relatives who approve that level of expenditure.

According to the most recent data provided by the National Funeral Directors Association, the cost of an average funeral is over \$7,300. Wisconsin's funeral directors often drastically reduce the price of even their least costly services to allow families to utilize state assistance.

In order for funeral homes to continue to provide this service without needing to cost-shift their losses to other customers, this bill makes a necessary adjustment for inflation. This change would also allow families of the deceased to contribute more toward their love one's funeral.

In order to maintain this important benefit for low-income people, I urge the committee to support Assembly Bill 832. Thank you for your consideration.



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www.wicemeteries.org

Officers

Bill Hoffmann- President
Graceland Cemetery, Milwaukee

David Brenner- Vice President
Prairie Home Cemetery, Waukesha

Kelly Tarczewski- Secretary
Pilgrims Rest Cemetery, Pewaukee

Mary Lemirande- Treasurer
Woodlawn Cemetery, Green Bay

Board of Directors

Christine Toson Hentges
The Tribute Companies
Hartland

Michael Baltus
Hillside Cemetery
Marshfield

John Okonek
Diocese of Stevens Point

Jeff Reinhart
La Crosse Catholic Cemeteries
La Crosse

Tiffany Dietz
The Bronze Stone Group
Nashotah, WI

Supplier Representative

Ted Tingesdahl
Matthews International Corp.

TO: Chairman Risser and members of the Senate Ethics Reform and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Bill Hoffman, President – Wisconsin Cemetery and Cremation Association

DATE: February 10, 2010

RE: *Please Amend Senate Bill 338*

The Wisconsin Cemetery and Cremation Association is committed to serving the needs of Wisconsin families who put their trust in us during their time of grief. Unfortunately, Senate Bill 338 would hamper the ability of cemeteries to best serve families under the Wisconsin Funeral & Cemetery Aids Program. With that in mind, the WCCA would urge you to amend SB 338 before taking action on the bill.

Under the Funeral & Cemetery Aids Program (Program), the state provides financial assistance to counties and tribal governments for funeral and cemetery expenses of certain indigent individuals. Counties are reimbursed up to \$1,500 for funeral costs if total funeral expenses do not exceed \$3,500 and \$1,000 for cemetery costs if total cemetery expenses do not exceed \$3,500.

Senate Bill 338 would increase the total allowable funeral expenses for indigent individuals under the Program from \$3,500 to \$4,500. Unfortunately, SB 338 would not treat cemetery services equally and would maintain the maximum allowable cost for cemetery expenses at \$3,500.

The WCCA would urge you to amend SB 338 to increase the total allowable cemetery expenses under the Program to \$4,500 so cemeteries and funeral establishments can compete on an even playing field.

The WCCA is not asking for preferential treatment, only parity with the funeral home industry. Under current state law, cemeteries are prohibited from engaging in the funeral business and, conversely, funeral homes cannot own or operate a cemetery. However, cemeteries and funeral establishments can “compete” in the sale of certain products, such as burial vaults, caskets and headstones.

Regrettably, SB 338 would favor the funeral home industry over the cemetery industry in the sale of these goods, putting cemeteries at a competitive disadvantage. Cemeteries are already at a disadvantage under the Program, as they only receive \$1,000 in direct reimbursement for indigent burials, compared to \$1,500 for funeral establishments.

It's important to point out that the WCCA's concern with SB 338 is not about profit, but rather about the ability of cemeteries to stay competitive in the current economy and best serve the needs of Wisconsin families.

Again, the WCCA would ask you to modify SB 338 to increase allowable cemetery expenses, in addition to funeral expenses, under the Wisconsin Funeral & Cemetery Aids Program.

The Wisconsin Cemetery and Cremation Association is a non-profit organization comprised of cemetery, crematory and supplier professionals. We are committed to increasing public knowledge regarding cemetery and cremation operations; facilitating the exchange of best practices among cemeteries and crematories; and maintaining high ethical standards in the industry to protect Wisconsin families during their time of grief.

DECEASED NAME _____

DATE OF DEATH _____ PLACE OF DEATH _____

STATEMENT OF FUNERAL GOODS AND SERVICES SELECTED

A. CHARGE FOR SERVICES:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Professional Services | |
| Funeral Director & Staff | \$ 1795 |
| Embalming | \$ 495 |
| Autopsied/Communicable Disease | \$ 150 |
| Other Preparations | \$ 250 |
| | \$ _____ |
| 2. Facilities & Equipment | |
| Use of Facilities & Staff for Visitation | \$ 415 |
| Use of Facilities for Funeral Ceremony | \$ 485* |
| Use of Facilities & Staff for Memorial | \$ 415* |
| Use of Equipment for Graveside Service | \$ 415* |
| Use of Equipment & Staff for Church | \$ 485* |
| Family Center | \$ 250 |
| | \$ _____ |
| 3. Automotive Equipment | |
| Transfer of Remains to Funeral Home | \$ 300 |
| Use of Limousine | \$ 385 |
| Use of Hearse | \$ 385 |
| Use of Utility Vehicle | \$ 100 |
| Bus | \$ 350 |

TOTAL SERVICE CHARGE	\$
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B. CHARGE FOR MERCHANDISE:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Casket | \$ _____ |
| Grave Box - Concrete | \$ _____ |
| Vault - Unpainted Monarch | \$ _____ |
| Urn | \$ _____ |
| Register Book/Cards | \$ 45 |
| Burial Clothing | \$ _____ |
| Insert Panels | \$ 225 |
| Acknowledgment Cards | \$ 40 |
| Headstone or Marker | \$ _____ |
| Air Tray/Combo | \$ 245 |

TOTAL MERCHANDISE CHARGE \$

TOTAL SERVICE AND MERCHANDISE CHARGE \$

The only warranty on the casket and/or outer burial container sold in connection with the service is the express written warranty, if any, granted by the manufacturer. Northwest Funeral Chapel makes no warranty express or implied with respect to the casket and/or outer burial container.

Billing To: _____

C. SPECIAL CHARGES:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| Forwarding of Remains to
Another Funeral Home | \$ _____ |
| Receiving of Remains from
Another Funeral Home | \$ _____ |
| Immediate Burial | \$ _____ |
| Direct Cremation | \$ _____ |
| Other Cost | \$ _____ |

D. CASH ADVANCES:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| Certified Copies (1st Copy \$20, each Add'l \$3) | \$ _____ |
| Saturday Overtime | \$ 275 |
| Clergy Honorarium | \$ 250 |
| Musician | \$ 100 |
| Extra Limo | \$ 385 |
| Newspaper Notice (Brief) | \$ 150 |
| Programs (200) | \$ 250 |
| Cemetery | \$ _____ |
| Flower Spray | \$ 250 |
| Cremation Permit | \$ 225 |
| Medical Certification | \$ 125 |
| Air Fare | \$ _____ |
| Medical Examiner Removal Fee | \$100 |
| Subtotal of Cash Advance | \$ _____ |
| *10% Service Charge | \$ _____ |

TOTAL CASH ADVANCES \$ _____

*We charge you for our services in obtaining the above cash advance items

SUMMARY OF CHARGES:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| A. CHARGES FOR SERVICES | \$ _____ |
| B. CHARGES FOR MERCHANDISE | \$ _____ |
| C. SPECIAL CHARGES | \$ _____ |
| D. CASH ADVANCES | \$ _____ |
| E. SALES TAX, IF APPLICABLE | \$ _____ |
| TOTAL FUNERAL HOME CHARGES | \$ _____ |

LESS CREDIT AND PREPAYMENTS:

	\$	_____
	\$	_____
	\$	_____
	\$	_____
TOTAL CREDIT	\$	_____

TOTAL CREDIT

BALANCE DUE \$ _____

If any law, cemetery or crematory requirements have required the purchase of any of the items listed above the law or requirement is explained below.

Outer Burial Container _____

Reason for Emblaming Public Viewing or Shipping

I hereby agree that I have examined the above stated items and found them to be correct and according to the arrangements requested and I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of this memorandum and agreement. I hereby represent that I have sufficient funds and assets legally available for payment of cash price and hereby agree and covenant jointly and severally to make payments of \$_____ 0.00 within _____ 0 days. A late charge of _____ 0.00% per year is applied to the unpaid balance beginning _____ 0 days from the date of this agreement. Any additional services or merchandise ordered or requested after the date of this agreement will be considered part of this agreement and the cost thereof will be considered part of this agreement and to cost thereof will be reflected on the final statement. I acknowledge that I have received the general price list and have been offered for review theasket price list and the out burial container price list.

X _____
Signed _____ Dated _____

Relationship to Deceased

X _____
Co-Signed _____ Dated _____

Relationship to Deceased	Number of Cases	Percentage of Total Cases
Spouse	1	1.0
Child	1	1.0
Parent	1	1.0
Sibling	1	1.0
Other	1	1.0
Total	5	5.0

Name of Northwest Funeral Chapel representative

Initials _____